

Message Text

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S/S:GTWOHIE

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY TUNIS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 221223

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PFOR, TS, US

SUBJECT:TUNISIAN DEMARCHE SEEKS ADDITION OF TUNIS TO
SECRETARY'S MIDDLE EAST ITINERARY

1. TUNISIAN AMBASSADOR HEDDA CALLED ON ATHERTON EVENING OF OCTOBER 7 ON URGENT BASIS. HE SAID THAT FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI, AFTER SEEING SECRETARY' MIDDLE EAST ITINERARY AMENDED TODAY TO INCLUDE SAUDI ARABIA, ALGERIA AND MOROCCO, TELEPHONED INSTRUCTION TO SEEK ADDITION OF TUNISIA. HEDDA SAID THAT INCLUSION OF CERTAIN COUNTRIES NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT WHILE EXCLUDING TUNISIA WOULD AFFECT ATTITUDE OF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA, OTHER TUNISIAN OFFICIALS AND TUNISIAN PUBLIC OPINION. HE REMINDED ATHERTON THAT SECRETARY, DURING HIS BRIEF STOP IN TUNIS IN NOVEMBER 1973, PROMISED TO COME AGAIN AND REPEATED PROMISE WHEN HE MET WITH CHATTI IN MARCH 1974. HEDDA ALSO NOTED THAT HE HAD RECENTLY TOLD ATHERTON THAT GOT STILL LOOKING FORWARD TO A VISIT.

2. HEDDA STRESSED THAT BOURGUIBA HAD A LONG ESTABLISHED AND COURAGEOUS POSITION SUPPORTING A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT. HOWEVER, OTHER ARAB LEADERS WHO HAVE EMBRACED THIS POSITION ONLY RECENTLY SEEM TO RECEIVE
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MORE ATTENTION. IF THE SECRETARY CAN VISIT ALGIERS AND

RABAT IT SEEMS HE COULD SPEND A FEW HOURS IN TUNIS.
TUNISIANS WILL NOT UNDERSTAND OUR RATIONALE FOR ACTING

OTHERWISE AND HARMFUL INTERPRETATIONS WILL RESULT.

3. ATHERTON EXPLAINED THAT DECISIONS TO EXPAND ITINERARY WERE MADE AT LAST MINUTE. WHEN ATHERTON MET CHATTI IN NEW YORK ON OCTOBER 2, FOR EXAMPLE, THERE WERE NO ADDITIONS TO ORIGINAL SCHEDULE. ATHERTON STATED HIS OWN VIEW THAT HE COULD NOT SEE WHERE THERE WOULD BE TIME TO ADD ANOTHER STOP BUT PROMISED TO CONVEY GOT REQUEST IMMEDIATELY TO SECRETARY. ATHERTON ASSURED HEDDA THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THE PROBLEM THIS POSED AND THAT THE SECRETARY CERTAINLY DOES NOT WANT TO AFFRONT TUNISIA OR PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA.

4. HEDDA MADE IT CLEAR THAT TUNISIAN PUBLIC OPINION COULD NOT UNDERSTAND A VISIT BY SECRETARY TO TWO OTHER COUNTRIES OF NORTH AFRICA BUT NOT TUNISIA. BOURGUIBA WAS SENIOR HEAD OF STATE IN NORTH AFRICA AND HAD GREATER CLAIM TO BE CONSULTED BY USG ON MIDDLE EAST QUESTION. FYI. DEPARTING FROM WHAT HE SAID WERE HIS INSTRUCTIONS, HEDDA NOTED THAT THERE WAS POSSIBILITY OF ADDING TUNISIA TO SECRETARY'S RETURN FROM SOUTH ASIA IN EARLY NOVEMBER. IT WOULD NOT HAVE SAME VALUE AS TRAVEL TO TUNIS AS PART OF FORTHCOMING TRIP, BUT IF SUCH PLANS COULD BE ANNOUNCED NOW IT MIGHT BE ACCEPTABLE TO GOT. END FYI.

5. WE WILL SEND YOU INSTRUCTIONS RE REPLY TO CHATTI ASAP FOLLOWING FURTHER CONSIDERATION HERE. MEANWHILE, IF GOT RAISES MATTER WITH YOU, YOU SHOULD DO BEST TO SUPPORT LINE ATHERTON TOOK WITH CHATTI AND REASSURE TUNISIANS, WHILE OBVIOUSLY AVOIDING SAYING ANYTHING THAT COULD APPEAR TO OPEN DOOR TO TUNIS STOP ON THIS TRIP. KISSINGER

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